

Message Text

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ACTION IO-13

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INFO AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L USUN 0596

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, UN, RQ, TU, CU, US
SUBJ: TUNISIAN PERM REP'S VISIT TO PUERTO RICO

1. ON FEBRUARY 28, TUNISIAN PERM REP MESTIRI GAVE US SOME IMPRESSIONS OF HIS RECENT VISIT TO PUERTO RICO. MESTIRI, WHO CONTINUED ON TO GEORGETOWN, LIMA, CARACAS, HAVANA, AND MEXICO FOLLOWING A FOUR-DAY STOPOVER IN SAN JUAN, EMPHASIZED HOW INTERESTING THE VISIT TO PUERTO RICO HAD BEEN AND THE CORDIAL RECEPTION AFFORDED HIM. HE WAS IMPRESSED TO SEE A "FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY" AT WORK AND EXPRESSED THE CONVICTION THAT THE RECENT ELECTION WAS A FAIR AND ACCURATE REFLECTION OF THE VIEWS OF THE PEOPLE OF PUERTO RICO. HE THOUGHT A STATUS REFERENDUM IN THE NEAR FUTURE WOULD RESULT IN A CLEAR MAJORITY FOR COMMONWEALTH BUT DOUBTED THAT THE COMMONWEALTH IS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE IN THE LONG RUN, MESTIRI SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH HE HAD SOME UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE QUESTION OF PUERTO RICAN STATUS PRIOR TO HIS VISIT, THE WHOLE ISSUE PROVED TO BE MUCH MORE COMPLEX AND NUANCED THAN HE HAD ANTICIPATED.

2. CONCERNING MESTIRI'S STATEMENT REPORTED IN THE SAN JUAN STAR THAT A UN PRESENCE WOULD BE DESIRABLE FOR ANY FUTURE STATUS REFERENDUM IN PUERTO RICO,
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MESTIRI EXPLAINED THAT HE SAW HOW SUCH A STATEMENT CONTRADICTED US VIEWS ON THE QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO'S STATUS, BUT HAD MADE IT BECAUSE OF HIS CONVICTION THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE INDEED HONEST AND ACCURATE.

3. MESTIRI SUGGESTED THAT IT MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO TO MEET INDIVIDUALLY AND INFORMALLY IN NY WITH MEMBERS OF THE COMITE OF 24. HE SAID THAT PUERTO RICANS WERE MUCH MORE PERSUASIVE ADVOCATES OF THEIR STATUS THAN NORTH AMERICAN OFFICIALS. MESTIRI ALSO SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO WITH A WIDE RANGE OF UN MEMBERS, BEYOND THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMITE OF 24. HE SAID THAT MANY UN MEMBERS TEND TO SEE "COLONIAL" QUESTIONS IN TERMS OF BLACK AND WHITE AND THAT THEY WOULD BENEFIT FROM AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO.

4. CONCERNING CUBAN ATTITUDES ON PUERTO RICO, MESTIRI SAID HE WAS SURPRISED THAT, ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT OF CUBA WAS AWARE THAT HE HAD VISITED PUERTO RICO PRIOR TO ARRIVING IN HAVANA, NO ONE RAISED THE QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO WITH HIM. HE ALSO EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT CUBAN EXPRESSIONS OF MODERATION AND "NONALIGNMENT" ON THE QUESTION OF SPANISH SAHARA. MESTIRI SAID THAT THERE WAS A GENERAL EXPECTATION OF MOVEMENT IN US/CUBAN RELATIONS AMONG THE OFFICIALS WITH WHOM HE SPOKE.

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